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ABSTRACT

In spring 1982, a study was conducted to determine the persistence of Howard Community College (HCC) students from fall 1981 to spring 1982 and the relationship of students' attendance status, sex, and age to retention rates. Selected study findings include the following: (1) the overall retention rate for spring 1982 was 61.1% including Special Students (i.e., students not matriculating in a certificate or associate degree program) and 66.1% excluding these students; (2) full-time students in occupational programs had the highest persistence rate (83.6%), and part-time Special Students had the lowest rates (41.9%); (3) 10.9% of the spring 1982 students had not attended HCC in fall 1981, but had attended in previous terms; (4) the two Maryland community colleges from which comparable retention data were obtained had overall retention rates of 68% and 52%; (5) fall-to-spring retention rates at HCC were between 61% and 62% from 1979 to 1982; (6) spring-to-fall retention rates were consistently lower than fall-to-spring rates, remaining in the 50% to 55% range; (7) females were more likely to persist in their studies from fall to spring than males, with statistically significant differences in the part-time students and total student categories; and (8) students in the age groups 17-19, 20-22, and 36-40 had the highest retention rates. (AYC)

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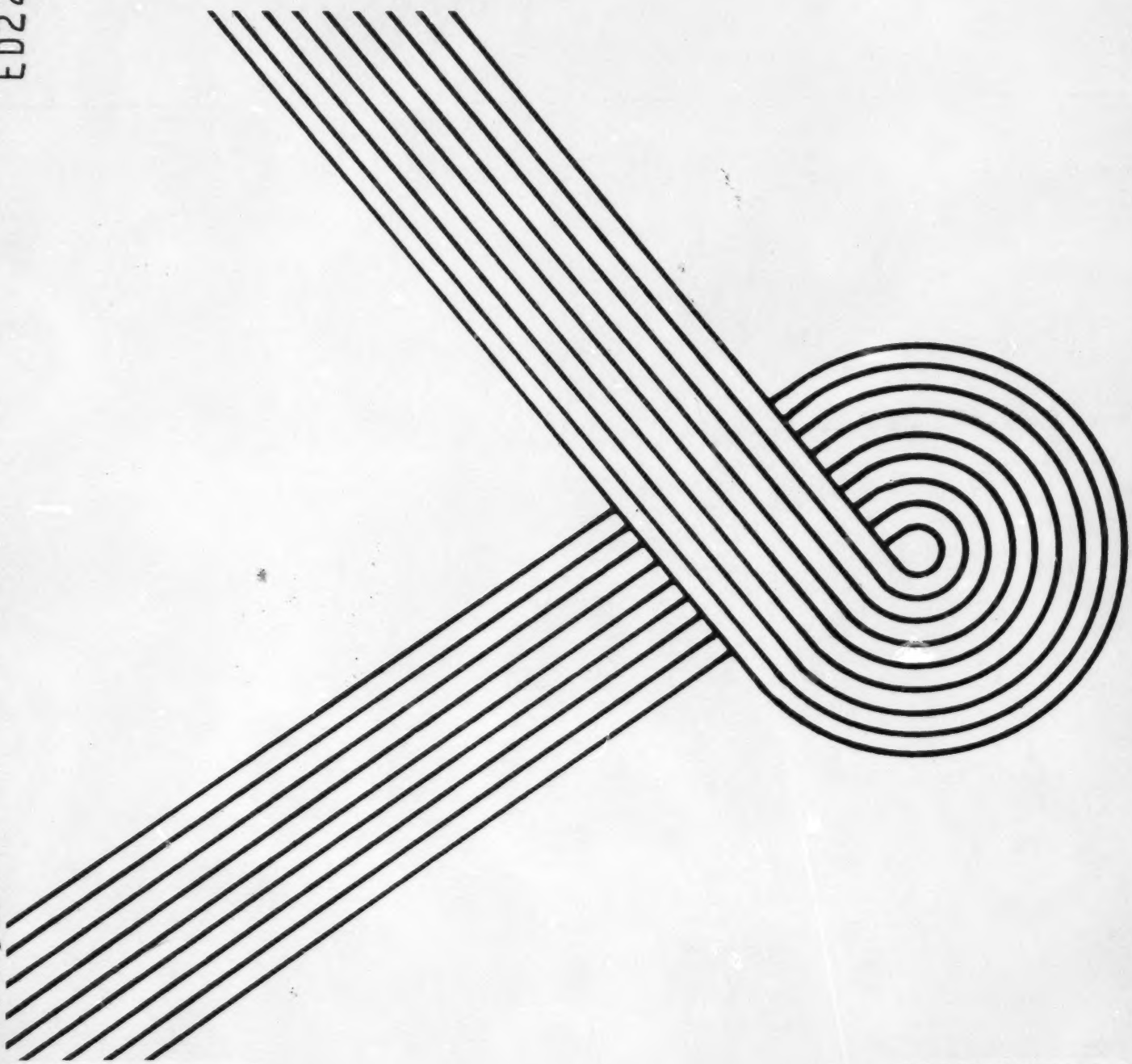

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RETENTION ANALYSIS FOR SPRING 1982

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Research Report Number 27
April 1982

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RETENTION, FALL 1981 TO SPRING 1982
HOWARD COMMUNITY COLLEGE
OFFICE OF RESEARCH AND PLANNING

I. Introduction

Retention of students is a continuing issue for community colleges. This analysis deals with the actual persistence of students from Fall 1981 to Spring 1982 and with the relationship of several variables (attendance status, sex, and age) to retention rates.

It is important to note that these figures say nothing about the reasons why students continue or do not continue. Past studies by the Research and Planning Office have shown that the actual "drop out" rate for all HCC students is only 12-15 percent for a typical fall to spring enrollment period, while the non-persistence rate is considerably higher[1]. Non-persisters particularly in community colleges have a variety of reasons for not continuing their studies from one semester to the next--completion of educational goals, transfer to four-year colleges, financial reasons, and others.

II. Spring 1982 Retention Rates

The overall retention rate for Spring 1982 was 61.1 percent; conversely the non-persistence rate was 38.9 percent. Excluding Special Students, the retention rate was 66.1 percent. Table 1 summarizes overall retention for the spring term.

TABLE 1
SUMMARY OF RETENTION RATES

Program Type	Full-Time	Part-Time	Total All Students
Occupational	83.6%	62.3%	67.6%
Transfer	80.2	54.9	63.1
General Studies	79.8	59.8	66.6
Special Students	68.8	41.9	43.1
Sub-Total (Special Students not included)	81.7	60.0	66.1
TOTAL	81.2	55.0	61.1

Full-time students in occupational programs have the highest persistence rate at 83.6%. Occupational students overall also are more likely to remain in school from fall to spring. As might be expected, part-time Special Students have the lowest rates (41.9%). These are the students most likely to be attending HCC for one or a few courses.

Table 2 shows the retention rates for full- and part-time students in all HCC programs.

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[1] A "drop-out" is defined as a student who did not return to HCC from Fall to spring, did not achieve his/her educational goal while at the College, and has no definite plan of returning to HCC.

TABLE 2

RETENTION RATES BY PROGRAM AND ATTENDANCE STATUS

SPRING 1982

PROGRAM	FULL-TIME	PART-TIME	TOTAL, ALL STUDENTS
OCCUPATIONAL			
Accounting	88.9	54.5	61.4
BMET	63.2	65.5	64.6
Bus. Mgmt.	88.1	56.3	62.2
Carpentry	62.5*	50.0	56.3
Data Processing	80.4	54.9	59.7
Electronics	84.6	66.7	72.1
Housing Mgmt.		33.3	33.3
Nursing	85.1	78.5	80.3
Plant Science	100.0	71.4	75.0
Retailing	100.0	33.3	55.6
Secretarial Sci.	85.1	63.4	69.4
Vision Care	91.7	75.0	87.5
SUB-TOTAL OCCUPATIONAL	83.6	62.3	67.6
TRANSFER			
Arts & Sciences	76.8	54.9	62.8
Bus. Admin.	89.5	55.1	63.5
Teacher Ed.	71.4	50.0	57.9
Engineering	77.8	59.3	68.5
SUB-TOTAL TRANSFER	80.2	54.9	63.1
GENERAL STUDIES	79.8	59.8	66.6
SPECIAL STUDENTS	68.8	41.9	43.1
SUB-TOTAL - SPECIAL STUDENTS NOT INCLUDED	81.7	60.0	66.1
TOTAL	81.2	55.0	61.1

*Carpentry figures include students enrolled in a one semester (Fall) certificate program.

III. Returning Students from Previous Semesters

Community college students are not typical of college students in general. They are a unique group or, more accurately, are made up of a number of sub-populations each with its own unique characteristics. One characteristic of at least some of these sub-populations is that of "stopping out," rather than "dropping out," for one or more semesters. These students may take one or more courses, off and on, for year after year to fit their own unique educational goals.

Another way to look at our retention rates is to include these students who, while they are not "persisters" from Fall 1981, are "persisters" from past semesters. There were 363 of these "readmit" students in Spring 1982. These students represent 10.9 percent of the Spring 1982 enrollment.

Although not included in the calculation of the fall-to-spring retention rates, these "readmit" students should be kept in mind when interpreting the retention rates presented in this study.

IV. Retention Rates -- Other Maryland Community Colleges

In order to put these rates in some perspective, an effort was made to obtain a small sample of retention rates from other Maryland community colleges. Only two (both larger than HCC) of those sampled had retention figures for Spring 1982. One reported an overall retention rate of 68 percent with sub-category rates as follows:

Technical and Career Programs	76%
Transfer Programs	74%
General Studies	68%
Special Students	43%
TOTAL	68%

The other had an overall fall-to-spring (1980/81) rate of 52 percent (further breakdown was not yet available). Unfortunately, many of the other Maryland community colleges do not do a retention analysis in a way that can be compared to ours. Therefore, a more comprehensive statewide analysis is not yet possible.

According to the American Council on Education Library, there are no national studies of retention in community colleges. In Maryland, the State Board for Higher Education has done a fall-to-fall retention analysis for four-year colleges and plans a similar study for community colleges.

V. Retention Rates Compared with Past Years

Table 3 puts the 1981-82 figures in an historical context by showing HCC retention rates from 1979 to the present (fall-to-spring rates can be compared to previous fall-to-spring rates, etc.).

Several trends can be noted from these data. First, retention rates have been remarkably consistent over the period of time reported. Fall-to-spring retention rates, for example, have been at 61 or 62 percent for each of the last three years. Second, spring-to-fall retention rates are con-

TABLE 3
RETENTION RATES BY PROGRAM, SPRING 1979 TO SPRING 1982

PROGRAMS	Spring 1979 to Fall 1979*	Fall 1979 to Spring 1980	Spring 1980 to Fall 1980*	Fall 1980 to Spring 1981	Spring 1981 to Fall 1981**	Fall 1981 to Spring 1982
OCCUPATIONAL						
Accounting	66.7	66.5	61.4	66.1	54.1	61.4
BMET	68.3	75.0	62.5	70.7	62.5	64.6
Business Mgmt.	58.7	65.1	63.5	61.9	54.3	62.2
Carpentry	95.2	68.0	100.0	75.0	46.2	56.3
Data Proc.	59.4	66.5	59.8	64.6	58.8	59.7
Electronics	75.0	44.4	72.7	37.2	30.8	72.1
Housing Mgmt.	85.7	78.6	50.0	50.0	20.0	33.3
Nursing	78.3	78.8	82.7	79.9	72.1	80.3
Phys. & Wholesale Dist.	-	-	-	50.0	-	-
Plant Science	27.3	46.2	38.1	37.5	36.1	75.0
Retailing	47.8	80.0	56.0	73.3	52.6	55.6
Sec. Science	67.1	61.4	59.5	66.2	63.1	69.4
Vision Care	78.1	78.3	90.0	70.0	64.3	87.5
SUB-TOTAL OCCUPATIONAL	67.3	67.7	66.9	67.2	59.1	67.6
TRANSFER						
Arts & Sciences	48.9	62.3	54.8	63.1	47.9	62.8
Business Admin	61.4	67.6	54.7	59.0	53.8	63.5
Engineering	-	-	-	-	-	68.5
Teacher Ed.	71.1	95.3	75.4	70.8	61.8	57.9
SUB-TOTAL TRANSFER	58.0	69.2	57.0	62.2	51.4	63.1
GENERAL STUDIES	57.1	65.7	61.5	65.3	42.2	66.6
SPECIAL STUDENTS	32.7	44.2	30.4	49.6	32.4	43.1
TOTAL SPECIAL STUDENTS NOT INCLUDED	63.2	68.2	63.2	65.4	53.9	66.1
TOTAL ALL STUDENTS	54.2	61.4	54.3	62.0	48.6	61.1

*Graduates excluded from non-persister count
**Graduates excluded from non-persister count and persister count

sistently lower than the fall-to-spring rates, with the former generally in the 50-55 percent range. Postsecondary institutions typically have a much more difficult time retaining students over the long summer break, and HCC is no exception. Third, retention rates for the transfer programs are considerably lower than those reported for occupational programs, especially for the spring-to-fall enrollment cycle. This is at least in part a result of students transferring to a four-year institution prior to completing their requirements for an A. A. degree at HCC[2]. Finally, Special Students--those students not matriculating in a certificate or associate degree program--consistently show the lowest retention rate, for reasons already noted.

Table 4 summarizes for the two most recent fall-to-spring cycles. Fall-to-spring retention rates increased from last year's percentages, in all categories except Special Students.

TABLE 4
COMPARISON OF RETENTION RATES
FALL-TO-SPRING 1981 AND FALL-TO-SPRING 1982

	Fall 1980 to Spring 1981	Fall 1981 to Spring 1982
Occupational Programs	67.2%	67.6%
Transfer Programs	62.2	63.1
General Studies	65.3	66.6
Special Students	49.6	43.1
Sub-total (Special Students not included)	65.4	66.1
TOTAL	62.0	61.1

VI. Retention Rates by Sex

Females were more likely to continue their studies than males. Differences between male and female persistence were statistically significant at or greater than .005 level of significance in the part-time and total categories[3]. There was also a difference in the full-time category, but not a statistically significant one. Table 5 shows these differences.

TABLE 5
RETENTION RATES BY SEX AND ATTENDANCE STATUS

	Male	Female	Difference	Total
Full-Time	80.5%	81.8%	+	81.2%
Part-Time	48.2	58.2	+10.0	55.0
TOTAL	57.8	62.8	+ 5.0	61.1

[2]This phenomenon is becoming a more frequent occurence statewide, as recently documented in Four Years Later: Follow-Up of 1976 Entrants in Maryland Community Colleges (May 1980).

[3]Chi-square value for part-time = 22.09560 with 1 degree of freedom
Chi-square value for total = 7.85965 with 1 degree of freedom

TABLE 6

RETENTION RATES BY AGE AND SEX

Age Group	Males	Females	Difference	Total
	%	%		%
16 or under	66.7*	-	-	50.0*
17-19	65.9	69.4	+ 3.5	67.9
20-22	67.8	68.5		68.2
23-25	49.7	54.5		52.5
26-30	50.3	59.7	+ 9.4	56.4
31-35	52.4	57.3	+ 4.9	55.9
36-40	58.2	64.5	+ 6.3	63.3
41-45	52.5	61.6	+ 9.1	59.5
46-50	48.5	61.1	+12.6	57.7
51-55	35.0*	70.9		61.3
56-60	38.5*	68.2		57.1
61-65	62.5*	63.6		63.3
66-70	33.3*	68.8		59.1
71 and over	**	**	-	**
TOTAL	57.8	62.8		61.1

* Total number in group too small for percentage to be meaningful.
** There are quite a number of students in these categories. Due to coding errors, however, figures are not accurate.

TABLE 7

RETENTION RATES BY AGE AND ATTENDANCE STATUS

Age Group	Full-Time	Part-Time	Total
	%	%	%
16 and under	100.0*	33.3	50.0
17-19	83.9	52.1	67.9
20-22	81.1	54.2	68.2
23-25	75.0	46.8	52.5
26-30	75.8	53.1	56.4
31-35	82.1	53.6	55.9
36-40	94.7	61.8	63.3
41-45	78.6	58.4	59.5
46-50	80.0*	55.8	57.7
51-55	75.0*	60.6	61.3
56-60	-	57.1	57.1
61-65	100.0*	60.7	63.3
66-70	-	59.1	59.1
71 and over	**	**	**
TOTAL	81.2	55.0	61.1

* There are fewer than 10 in these categories; this severly limits meaning of percentages.

** There are quite a number of students in these age categories. Coding errors, however, prevent an accurate count.

TABLE 8

AGE DISTRIBUTION OF FALL 1981 STUDENT POPULATION

Age Group	Full-Time		Part-Time		Total	
	N	% of FT Total	N	% of PT Total	N	% of Total
16 and under	1	.1	3	.1	4	.1
17-19	192	24.7	194	7.5	386	11.5
20-22	349	44.9	323	12.5	672	20.0
23-25	72	9.3	284	11.0	356	10.6
26-30	66	8.5	397	15.4	463	13.8
31-35	39	5.0	448	17.4	487	14.5
36-40	19	2.4	387	15.0	406	12.1
41-45	14	1.8	245	9.5	259	7.7
46-50	10	1.3	113	4.4	123	3.7
51-55	4	.5	71	2.8	75	2.2
56-60	-	-	35	1.4	35	1.0
61-65	2	.3	28	1.1	30	.9
66-70	-	-	22	.9	22	.7
71 and over		**		**		**
TOTAL	776	100	2554	100	3330	100

** There are quite a number.

The difference between male and female retention rates appears to be found in most age categories, except the 20-22 age group. Table 7 shows the breakdown by age and sex. Differences are most dramatic, as might be expected in the 26 to 50 age groups.

VII. Retention Rates by Age and Attendance Status

Table 7 shows retention rates by selected age groups. Three age groups stand out with higher retention rates: 17-19; 20-22; and 36-40. This breakdown by age distribution is also available for each HCC program upon request by interested staff.

VIII. Age Distribution of Fall 1981 Student Population

Table 8 shows the overall age distribution of the entire Fall 1981 student population by attendance status. This table can be used to place the retention rates for different student age groups in perspective vis-a-vis the potential impact on total College enrollments. In addition, this table adds further data to the continuing description of the student population.

National trends show community college student populations to be made up of two quite different subgroups: part-time and full-time (William Hyde, The Age and Related Demographic Characteristics of Students Attending Community Colleges and Four-Year Institutions, Education Finance Center, Denver, 1980). This division is not a definitive one, of course, as students frequently move from one mode to the other. In general, however, it is possible to describe a difference between the two populations.

For example, Table 8 shows that the 17-22 age group comprises 69.6 percent of the full-time population. But in the part-time category, 47.8 percent of the population is made up of the 26-40 age group.

IX. Conclusion

An analysis of retention rates shows only one small aspect of the whole picture of student goals and their persistence in attaining them. This analysis does not, of course, show what the goals are or which of the "non-persisting" students left without attaining their goals. It also does not show which "non-persisting" students will return in a future semester.

With these limitations in mind, however, this analysis provides data and information which will be helpful in understanding some of the characteristics of the different student populations served by the College. Tracking these data over time will assist staff in identifying trends and in developing proactive strategies to meet student needs.

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